

The Builder.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1852.



PEOPLE are again talking about arrangements for the protection of the public health,—the improvement of the material condition of the community,—and

it may be hoped that something, at all events, is being really done, and that the spread of information is gradually lessening the number of those who, as *Punch* sings, pooh-pooh,

"And laugh to scorn doctors and drainers,—
Who self-government call
Not to govern at all—
Of the great cause of dirt stout maintainers;
Who, when orders come down
For cleansing the town,
Wish to know by what right they're dictated to:
Talk of drain-pipes and hose,
And they turn up their nose,
And declare they don't want to be prated to."

The rapid approach of the cholera has led to movement in various quarters, which unfortunately will subside, as it did last year, when the enemy has carried off his thousands, and left our shores. At Manchester, last week, an influential meeting resolved,—“That, in the opinion of this meeting, it is desirable that special means be adopted to promote, among the labouring and poorer classes of this district, a due attention to temperance, personal and domestic cleanliness, and to the laws of health generally; and also to induce them to co-operate with the boards of health in giving effect to their regulations for sanitary improvement;” and a committee was appointed to recommend the means to be adopted to carry out the resolution. The meeting fully recognized the fact, that efforts to diffuse a knowledge of the sanitary laws, and inducing attention to improved principles of domestic and social economy (having, of course, due regard to the numerous other agencies at work to benefit the poor), would also effectually help forward that religious, moral, and intellectual elevation of the labouring and poorer classes of society, which the interests of this country most emphatically demand.

In Edinburgh the Corporation show a desire to take some useful steps. From Liverpool we hear of the arrangement of a model lodging-house by the Rev. C. Wray, capable of accommodating forty men, which, it is to be hoped, will lead to the improvement of some of the crowded, ill-ventilated, and miserable dens which disfigure that city, and rob it of life and money. In no part of the kingdom, however, are there more fearful pest-houses, manufactories of fever, with its concomitant destitution, and crime, and horror, than there are in London. When examining some of these places, knowing the evidence of medical men that typhus fever is simply the result of dirt, crowding, and foul air,—that the poisonous atmosphere from human contamination is competent to produce fever at any time,—

"Subtle and still,
Sure and slow,
Certain to kill
With an unheard blow,"—

it seemed miraculous that the average health of the metropolis was not lower than it is.

A short time ago, M^{re}. Emile Chevalier, a commissioner from the French Government, applied to the General Board of Health for

information as to model dwellings and improvements of the habitations of the labouring classes. Ten millions of francs (400,000*l*.) have been voted for the erection of model dwellings by that Government, and they were desirous of availing themselves of the best experience on this subject. He was shown Prince Albert's cottages, and he was also shown the various other improved dwellings erected by the Labourers' Friends Society, the Metropolitan Buildings Society, and the various new model lodging-houses. But that he might see and appreciate more fully the extent of the improvement, he was taken to some of the unimproved dwellings in the worst-conditioned districts, and he was shown some of the unregulated common lodging-houses at night. The Count Cavour, who was Minister of Public Works, &c. at Sardinia, had applied for similar information, and he was taken on the same inspection, accompanied by an officer of the General Board, a superintendent of police. We are not surprised to learn that both the foreign visitors, whilst they stated their satisfaction at the improvements which they had witnessed in the construction and keeping of the model lodging-houses and dwellings, could not withhold their expressions of horror at some of the scenes in the common lodging-houses to which they were taken. They were astonished and shocked,—and well they might be,—to find that, in the metropolis of the British Empire, on the outside so imposing in appearance, the condition of large masses of the labouring classes who lived in its bye streets should present such a contrast, so much filth, such neglect, and extreme disorder. They did not believe that such scenes as they had witnessed could exist in any civilized community. They hoped and believed that nothing of these extreme horrors could exist in their own capital, where there was, nevertheless, great need of such improvements as those of which they had inspected examples. The visitors examined, too, baths and washhouses, the Sailors' Home, and other works with the same objects, and were gratified.

A previous visit of the same kind had been made by two architects commissioned by the Belgian Government, who also reported favourably upon it. The example which has been set in London is being followed in various foreign towns. At Berlin a voluntary association for the improvement of dwellings for the labouring classes is in satisfactory progress, the provisions of which, as they are in some respects peculiar, we give on another page. We must notice that Prince Albert's model cottages have been pulled down in consequence of some preceding arrangements. This is to be regretted, as they contained points of construction, such as the rooms lined with glazed bricks, found in no other; and though they may not have been perfect as models, they served their object in the spread of improvements, and which it seems they have done to a great extent both at home and abroad.

For the promotion of the cause we are advocating a congress has been held in Brussels, in which representatives from England, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, Norway, Switzerland, and other countries took part. At the first meeting, held on the 20th September, there were about 250 persons present, and M^{re}. Charles Rogier, the minister of the interior, presided.

England was represented by Lord Ebrington, Dr. Arnott, Mr. H. Roberts, Mr. Ward, Mr. Charles Cochrane, and others. There seems to have been a little want of agreement between one of our countrymen, who was present, and the others, which was not fortunate. The meeting appears to have been conducted with much ability, and cannot fail to produce good. As M^{re}. Vismbeckx observed, the congress did not pretend to originate ideas: its object was to bring them into the light and popularize them. “This popularization of which I speak,” said he, “is it not the first step toward success? However decided the resistance may be to improvements, it yields and falls when their necessity becomes apparent to all, and there are calls on all sides for their realization.”

The members of the congress divided themselves into four sections, each taking charge of certain questions, and discussing them previously to bringing them before the general meeting. The first section took cognizance of workmen's dwellings, baths and washhouses, lodging-houses, &c. The second of sewers and drains, the distribution of water, and ventilation. The third, the superintendence of public health, burials, cemeteries, &c.; and the fourth, the adulteration of commodities, infant labour, and the government of workshops. At the third meeting the King of the Belgians “assisted.”

On each of the subjects apportioned to the various sections, specific sets of rules were discussed and agreed to by the general body. The fourth meeting was particularly noticeable for an able and comprehensive speech by Dr. Boudin, of Paris, on the question, What are the essential rules which should govern the ventilation of public buildings and private houses, and what are the methods which appear worthy of being specially recommended?

Of course the members of the congress dined together, at which Lord Ebrington made a very successful speech in proposing the health of M^{re}. Rogier, the minister of the interior; and, amongst other toasts, M^{re}. Cluyssenaar proposed the health of the foreign architects who had taken part in the proceedings.

One who went into Belgium on this occasion recalls to us the observation which we made some time ago on the walking grounds and open places of continental towns.

In the majority of our large towns, there is a great want of places for walking and for recreation. Abroad, the demolished walls or fortifications formerly around the city offer in many cases an admirable walking ground, such as we have at Chester, and they have moreover many open places, with seats and trees common to all, and which serve to lessen the causes for repining and discontent on the part of the less affluent portion of the community. We have urged this again and again: nevertheless, the agitation of the subject is more needed now than it ever was, the tendency being to cover with bricks and mortar every foot of available ground, and to enclose instead of open “common land.” Apart from the sanitary view of the question, it is the bounden duty no less than the wisest policy of all who have it in their power, to aid in lightening the labour and providing for the recreation of the toiling multitudes. To work is the first necessity: we must all work in one way or another, if we would live happily; but work is not our end: we must work, but it is in